

4.15

Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

Modifiers help describe a word. Prepositional phrases, adjective clauses, participle phrases, and infinitive phrases are all modifiers. They should be placed as close as possible to the words that they describe within a sentence. Phrases or clauses that are incorrectly placed within a sentence are called *misplaced* phrases. Phrases that are not describing anything are called *dangling* modifiers. You can eliminate these problems by placing the phrases in the correct position.

Wrong: Jumping into the net, the crowd saw the trapeze artist. (This is a misplaced participle phrase since the crowd did not jump into the net; the trapeze artist did.)

Correct: The crowd saw the trapeze artist jumping into the net.

Wrong: Whirring in the basement, the man heard the fan. (This is a misplaced participle phrase because the man was not whirring in the basement; the fan was whirring in the basement.)

Correct: The man heard the fan whirring in the basement.

Wrong: Robert Clemens concocts interesting plots who is a mystery writer. (This is a misplaced adjective clause because Robert Clemens, and not the plots, is the mystery writer.)

Correct: Robert Clemens, who is a mystery writer, concocts interesting plots.

Wrong: To win the state lottery, a ticket must be purchased. (dangling infinitive phrase)

Correct: To win the state lottery, the contestant must purchase a ticket.

Wrong: Lifting the stack of books from her desk, her nose itched. (This is a dangling participle phrase problem since her nose cannot possibly lift the stack of books from her desk. Thus, the participial phrase modifies nothing.)

Correct: Her nose itched while Dana lifted the stack of books from her desk.

4.15 Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers (Continued)


How would you correct each of these four sentences? Add any words that you think complete your thought. Write your answers on the lines provided.

Running from the scary scene, Mary's foot hurt.

To run in that marathon, an application must be filled out.

Shopping in the hardware store, the hammer was purchased by the older man.

The fish was fried by the man on the grill.

 **WRITING TIP** Make sure that your modifiers make sense. Read the sentence aloud. Visualize the sentence. Check to see that the modifier appears close to the noun or pronoun that it is modifying. The examples in this lesson well illustrate this dilemma of dangling and misplaced modifiers.

4.15A**Only Five (Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers)**

Only five of the following sentences contain modifiers that are used correctly. Place a C on the line next to those five sentences. For the remaining ten sentences that use modifiers incorrectly, correct those sentences on a separate sheet of paper. Visualize each sentence, and say it aloud to help you.

1. _____ Walking to the pitcher's mound, the grass was kicked by the coach.
2. _____ Attached to the flagpole, Patty saw the beautiful new state flag.
3. _____ Seeing the boats pass, the fisherman waved to those on the decks.
4. _____ Found mangy, panting, and hungry on the curb, the police officer handed the dog to its proper owner.
5. _____ Henrietta used the cell phone given to her by her parents.
6. _____ Licking his hind leg, the owner washed his cat.
7. _____ After washing the dishes, the doorbell rang three times.
8. _____ Watching television in the den, Dad fell asleep within an hour.
9. _____ Peeking into the closet, my birthday presents were seen by me.
10. _____ Having comfortable seats and plenty of legroom, I enjoyed the treat of sitting in the first-class section.
11. _____ Rejuvenated by the workout, the gymnast felt satisfied with herself.
12. _____ After dirt-biking all day over this challenging course, my muscles were sore.
13. _____ Looking down between the clouds, the Grand Canyon was seen by the pilot.
14. _____ Before going to sleep, I sorted out all my camping gear into three piles.
15. _____ After lifting the heavy package, it was placed down on the platform by Richie.